

# Nearly one-third of Chicago teachers reject CTU concessions deal

Alexander Fangmann  
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Late Tuesday evening, November 1, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) announced the results of voting by rank-and-file teachers on the concession-laden contract the union negotiated with Chicago Public Schools (CPS). With less than 60 schools still to be counted, the tentative results reported by CTU had 72 percent of teachers voting to approve the deal and just under 28 percent voting to reject. Now that voting by teachers is completed, a final ratification by the CPS board sets the stage for a purge of veteran teachers and further assaults on public education.

The push to get teachers to ratify the contract takes place in the context of the current presidential election campaign and the CTU's desire for unity with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Democratic Party as a whole. An important component of the union's strategy was the dragging out of negotiations over a period of 15 months. The constant delays, including two separate strike votes and a limited one-day strike, were undertaken to blunt teacher militancy and to prepare the way for a closer integration of CTU leadership into the administration of the schools on the basis of an austerity program.

Now that the agreement, referred to by both CTU President Karen Lewis and CPS spokespersons as a "fair contract," has been concluded, the union is attempting to mobilize teachers in support of Hillary Clinton and other Democrats in the upcoming elections. In fact, the next item appearing on the CTU's web site on Wednesday after the news about the vote itself is an item explaining that the CTU is backing the general election political endorsements of the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), essentially the entire Democratic Party slate, including Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and other figures who have long spearheaded attacks on workers.

Forrest Claypool, the CPS CEO and an Emanuel appointee, cast the agreement as an opportunity to work with the unions to get more funding for CPS out of Republican Governor Bruce Rauner. "With a new collective bargaining agreement in place," he said, "we will be able to work together to advocate for the resources our students deserve from the state." While placing blame for inadequate funding solely on the Republicans, the fact is the Democratic Party has overseen the starving of the public schools for decades.

This was echoed by Karen Lewis in a speech to the City Club of Chicago where she assured the corporate and political elite, "We will work with them to shore up their financial issues by promoting legislation that will adequately and equitably fund all of Illinois schools."

The vote itself was spread over Monday and Tuesday of this week, after having been postponed from the end of last week. While the CTU tried to portray this as a courtesy that would give teachers the weekend to read the tentative agreement in full after a "printing delay" prevented distribution in time for the earlier vote this was no doubt due to suspicion and dissent from rank-and-file educators. It cannot be excluded the CTU decided that an attempt to ram through the agreement without terms being available would risk a rejection by the rank-and-file.

Should the vote percentages stay roughly the same after all ballots have been counted, this contract will have registered among the lowest levels of support for a ratified contract in decades. Even the last contract, which paved the way for the closing of 50 schools, had approval from 79 percent of teachers.

Several figures in the CTU leadership, including Vice President Jesse Sharkey, a member of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organization (ISO), have complained about people on the Internet and Facebook,

by which they chiefly mean the *World Socialist Web Site* and its supporters, calling the contract a “sellout” and calling for its rejection. Sharkey and the ISO—functioning on behalf the Emanuel administration—have done everything to conceal the consequences of this rotten deal and ram it past teachers.

Completely exposing the sham claims that this is any kind of a victory for teachers or for public education, Claypool went on an offensive after the ratification to reassure the ruling class that the contract would end up ultimately cutting costs, and claimed that it would end up costing the district \$400 million less than the previous contract. He even boasted that “Our agreement with the CTU is the most cost-effective contract in the history of CPS mayoral control” and that it will allow CPS to “bend its cost curve,” that is, to ultimately reduce the amount of money spent on public education.

Emanuel and the CTU are preparing for more attacks on schools, not least of all through the early retirement program created in the new contract, which is designed to purge the district of higher paid senior teachers. The scheme will pay \$1,500 per year of service, but only if 1,500 or more teachers agree to quit by the end of the year, raising the specter of mass layoff threats and other moves to push out more experienced teachers.

Teachers must draw the lessons from this betrayal. The CTU and their pseudo-left hatchet men function as direct tools of the budget-cutting Democratic Party and the banks and big business they defend. The way forward is to build new organizations of struggle, controlled by rank-and-file workers, to mobilize the broadest sections of the working class to defend public education and the social rights of the working class. This must be combined with the development of political counter-offensive of the working class based on a socialist perspective, which insists that society’s wealth be utilized to meet human needs, including vastly improving public education, instead of war and bank bailouts.



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